Recognition of employees is more relevant than ever in today’s workplace. Even with a difficult economy and high unemployment, good people will always be in demand. You can’t afford to lose key employees to competitors or anyone else, yet this is exactly what is at risk for employees who don’t feel recognized.

How do you increase retention as the economy rebounds? One answer many organizations are turning to is a reward or recognition program. And as a supervisor, you are the most visible representative of your employer to employees, so recognition from you often says to them that the organization itself values them.


Let’s look at each one in turn. Decide which ones you can use or adapt with your employees.

1. Service Awards

These awards honor employees for their years of service. These awards are the predominant form of employee recognition. Fully 91 percent of organizations use them to honor employee tenure. Furthermore, more than two-thirds of organizations believe employees should be recognized for a service milestone starting at their first year.

2. Above and Beyond Awards

These awards pay tribute to employee effort and dedication. This recognition of individuals who go above and beyond their everyday responsibilities not only encourages those performers but also often inspires others to do the same. Organizations with 20,000 or more employees tend to use this kind of initiative more often than companies with fewer employees—but that doesn’t mean Above and Beyond Awards might not work well in your smaller venue.

3. Peer-to-Peer Awards

This type of award produces an environment for recognition. Peer-to-peer initiatives give employees more opportunities to be recognized. In a healthy recognition culture, employees should receive positive feedback at least every 7 days. In the real world, however, only 30 percent of employees are recognized more than once a year.

4. Manager-to-Peer Awards

This type of award improves manager/employee relationships and motivates high performance. Indeed, Manager-to-Peer Awards give managers (and supervisors) a reliable method to recognize their teams. A caring manager is a key driver of employee engagement, which in turn motivates higher performance.

Tip

- One way to gauge your effectiveness at recognizing employees is to use the statistic that the average job tenure is 4.6 years: If you have employees who’ve been with you longer than that, you’re doing a good job making them feel valued.
What are the three most important attributes of a good manager/supervisor?
1. Goal-oriented
2. Compassionate
3. Honest

Work on improving these qualities in your own supervisory duties.

Tip
- Consider setting a goal to recognize at least one employee once a day—every day. Why? Research has shown that employee engagement rises by 35 percent if recognition is given daily.

5. Core Values Award
   
   This type of award reinforces employee values and good conduct. In other words, it reinforces desired behaviors. Keeping core values front and center by linking them to specific recognition initiatives reinforces desired behaviors and creates a positive culture.

   Here’s how this principle looks when presented as a formula:
   
   Core Values + Recognition Initiatives = Desired Behaviors + Positive Culture

   The challenge for employers is that 44 percent of employees don’t feel the employer’s recognition programs are tied to the core values of the organization. So make sure you make that connection if you decide to use this type of award.

Harness the Power of Thanksgiving

Todd Patkin, author of Finding Happiness: One Man’s Quest to Beat Depression and Anxiety and—Finally—Let the Sunshine In (StepWise Press, 2011) offers these tips to tap into the spirit of Thanksgiving to improve morale, retention, and the bottom line:

1. Always say “thank you.” By taking a few seconds out of your day, you will improve another person’s mood, day, and productivity level.

2. Take intent into account. I often tried to show my employees just how much I appreciated them by highlighting various employees in company newsletters, planning company parties, etc. Sometimes those plans were well received; other times they weren’t. Remember that despite negative feedback, showing gratitude is always the right thing.

3. Start being more open. If you’re a leader, constructively tell your people how they can improve their performances. If you’re a team member, ask your coworkers and boss how you’re doing and how you can improve. And learn how to receive constructive criticism. Showing others that you care enough to either help them or to improve yourself is a form of gratitude, because you’re demonstrating that your team is worth your time, energy, and advice.

4. Learn to graciously accept thanks. If you brush off compliments or ignore expressions of gratitude, you’ll eventually stop hearing “thanks!” altogether, and you’ll be discouraging the person complimenting you from reaching out to others in the same way. Whenever someone thanks you, let them know that their words have been meaningful.

5. Keep the gratitude going outside of your organization. Thank your customers or clients for choosing your organization, and for trusting your team with their money, health, products, or publicity. This is something that they don’t often hear, so when they do, their loyalty to your company is strengthened.

6. Use gratitude to reinforce stellar performances. Using gratitude to shape your team’s habits and priorities can be as valuable as training programs and industry conferences—at a fraction of the time and cost.